Before Putting Mouth (and Operation) in Gear, Ensure Brain is Engaged:

The importance of Communication and Information in Military Operations

BY

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This study is an examination of the role of information and communication in war and military operations. This involves communication with the American public, its military and the adversary. How can America and its military best incorporate an information campaign into its overall plan and more importantly, why should it do so. The role of information has, and will continue to increase and every message and action carries with it intended and unintended results. Having a strong strategy and plan of action, instead of an ad hoc plan, will help America convey its messages and influence the operation and audiences both at home and abroad. Tied in closely is that public perception and will, Clausewitzs moral force, affect decision makers on both sides. Influence those perceptions can help make the case for US involvement. Three case studies, the 1948-49 Berlin Airlift, the 1968 Tet Offensive and American military operations in the early 1990s, Desert Storm and Restore Hope, are examined. How America told its story and justified its military actions are key ingredients in how successful an operation was while cognitive dissonance between what the government said was happening and what the American people were actually seeing played a large role in undermining support. This study will show that a robust, planned and sourced information/communication component is a necessity in any military operation.

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The undersigned certify that this thesis meets masters level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

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ABSTRACT

This study is an examination of the role of information and communication in war and military operations. This involves communication with the American public, its military and the adversary.

How can America and its military best incorporate an information campaign into its overall plan and more importantly, why should it do so. The role of information has, and will continue to increase and every message and action carries with it intended and unintended results. Having a strong strategy and plan of action, instead of an *ad hoc* plan, will help America convey its messages and influence the operation and audiences both at home and abroad.

Tied in closely is that public perception and will, Clausewitz's moral force, affect decision makers on both sides. Influence those perceptions can help make the case for US involvement.

Three case studies, the 1948-49 Berlin Airlift, the 1968 Tet Offensive and American military operations in the early 1990s, Desert Storm and Restore Hope, are examined. How America told its story and justified its military actions are key ingredients in how successful an operation was while cognitive dissonance between what the government said was happening and what the American people were actually seeing played a large role in undermining support.

This study will show that a robust, planned and sourced information/communication component is a necessity in any military operation.

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*Communications dominate war; broadly considered, they are the
most important single element in strategy, political or military.*

- RADM Alfred Thayer Mahan

INTRODUCTION

Mahan was speaking of actual communication lines, spoken and
written, not media, the press or the population. However, his point is
still just as true and because of this, communication remains a vital part
of any military action. For example, Combined Joint Special Operations
Task Force Afghanistan was losing the information war. The Taliban
spokesman, Mawauli Latifola Hakimi controlled the information flow,
issuing press releases, oftentimes inaccurate or downright lies, giving the
Afghani people and indeed the media at large the impression that the
coalition was not only incredibly unsuccessful in its operations but that
the CJSOTF was losing personnel and material at an alarming rate. The
public affairs officer was not just reluctant, but actually hostile to the
idea of countering the Taliban's lies. It was not until Lieutenant Colonel
Douglas Marrs, the CJSOTF's deputy J3, took action and began
countering the Taliban's information campaign that the coalition began
to see some results in the information component; results that tied
directly to kinetic operations. Successes began slowly as the media
starting putting words such as "unconfirmed" into their reports quoting
Hakimi. Eventually, Hakimi slipped up in his quest to take command
again in the information war and mentioned an attack that had not yet
happened. The CJSOTF was able not only to block the attack, killing six
or seven Taliban in the process, but then issued a press release thanking
the Taliban and Hakimi personally for the insights they provided.[1]

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[1] Douglas S. Marrs, "From the IO Front." *IO Sphere*, Summer 2008, 3

This situation is not unique. Department of Defense public affairs, long conditioned to the Cold War mentality of reactive actions, was not set up to engage in a fast moving war of information. Unfortunately, this is exactly what the United States found itself in following the events of September 11, 2001. For over forty years, the United States had been focused on the monolithic "evil empire" of the communist Soviet Union. The enemy was often fairly clear and preparations for combat operations, with occasional anomalies such as the war in Vietnam, were confined to the expected Warsaw Pact invasion of Western Europe and as such, focused on large-scale, conventional warfare. Things have changed.

Today's warfare is characterized by smaller scale, quick moving actions. Even the invasion of Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein's government lasted less than a month. Additionally, today commanders, planners, and leaders not only deal with, but also factor in the globe-spanning telecommunications network that allows mom and pop in Smalltown, USA to see combat operations across the world live. At the same time, combatants are attempting to put out their messages to the worldwide audience to convince people of their justness, erode the opposition's support, or set the conditions for victory. While America is the strongest nation in the world militarily, some, such as former Secretary of Defense (SECDEF)Rumsfeld and even current SECDEF Gates, claim we are losing the information war. This war, which may not involve kinetic actions, such as bomb dropping, nevertheless has the ability to shape worldwide public opinion. So, while we can destroy just about any target in the world, we often cannot convey why we are doing so. The SECDEFs' assertion essentially says that despite its overwhelming superiority, the United States may be unable to translate its military wins into meaningful, long-term gains in the future.

That being the case, how can America and its military best incorporate an information campaign into an overall plan and, more

importantly, why should it do so? As battlegrounds become less kinetic in nature, the role of information operations has increased and will continue to do so. Every message and action carries with it intended and unintended results. Having a strong strategy and plan of action instead of an *ad hoc* plan will help America convey its messages and influence the battle and the world, taking these second and third order effects into consideration, or at least planning for and mitigating the obvious information *faux pas.*[2] Tied in closely is the fact that public perceptions affect decision makers on both sides. Influencing those perceptions can also help make the case for US involvement.

This study examines the utility of the information component in military operations and how we can use it to further strategic aims in regards to both stated and unstated aims. Additionally, the study will look at the analytical strengths and weaknesses of including information operations in future combat operations and how they can best be leveraged. Finally, this study will also look at why it is important that the military in particular has a communications strategy before and during operations.

Methods and Sources

This study uses a combination of primary and secondary sources to answer the research question. Many of the works are historical studies of various military operations. Additionally, this study uses public relations, marketing, and advertising works to help round out the ideas of the information component.

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[2] For the purpose of this thesis, second and third order effects are those effects, intended or otherwise, that follow indirectly from an action. For example to arm locals for their protection might have the first order effect of providing those people weapons and protection. A second order effect might be that the recipients use their weapons to kill people from another ethnic or religious group for personal reasons not affiliated with personal protection. The third order effect might thus be that giving this particular group weapons alienates other ethnic groups in the area and turns them against the government.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 looks at the Information Component in War, presenting a theoretical framework for analysis of the historical cases. Chapter 2 examines the Berlin Airlift as the first truly information conflict. Chapter 3 explores Vietnam, the first television war, specifically focusing on the 1968 Tet Offensive, while Chapter 4 looks at a combination of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990-1991 and Restore Hope in 1992-1993. Chapter 5 briefly summarizes the major points with emphasis on how planners and strategists can use these insights in future operations and provides general conclusions.

Chapter One

The Information Component in War

Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed.
> - Abraham Lincoln

We seek to shape the world, not merely be shaped by it; to influence events for the better instead of being at their mercy.
> - President George Bush
> 2006 National Security Strategy

When you fight an action…in our modern media world, you are fighting it on television! It is an extraordinary thing.
> - Prime Minister Tony Blair

I venture to say no war can be long carried on against the will of the people
> - Edmund Burke

It is fatal to enter any war without the will to win it.
> - General Douglas MacArthur

Victoria Clarke, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs under Donald Rumsfeld said, "As geographical boundaries blur and interactions increase, the ability to communicate effectively has bottom-line impacts on governments and corporations around the world. Now more than ever, people need to know how to communicate."[1] Heading the office that saw successful embedding of journalists into military units, Clarke is certainly able to offer that observation with some practical experience to back it up.

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[1] Torie Clarke, *Lipstick on a Pig* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), xi

This is more than just "communication" as communication is commonly understood. It is more than talking to one's people to ensure they know why the nation is going to war. It is about setting the conditions for victory. As Clausewitz said, "Military activity is never directed against material force alone; it is always aimed simultaneously at the moral forces which give it life..."[2] Clausewitz goes on to discuss the three elements that comprise the trinity of war: the people (violence); the commander and army (chance); and the government (reason). While the three must work together, it is people with "the passions that are to be kindled in war..." that can be manipulated.[3]

Today the communications/information component is a vital part of any military undertaking, from humanitarian relief to combat operations. There are two key factors at play here. The first, related to popular support, is the national will or moral forces Clausewitz discussed. We communicate because we want people to *think* in a certain way. By communicating with them, we get them to align their attitudes and beliefs in support of our plans and operations. Ensuring people are thinking along the lines we want them to can empower an operation. Conversely failing to ensure we have accounted for and influenced our audience can just as easily undermine public support, forcing an early and unsuccessful end to operations. Second, and closely related, is that we communicate because we want people to *act* in a certain way. This applies to both friendly and hostile forces, for by getting people to act in the manner we wish, whether it involves taking certain actions, or refraining from them, we can assist our operations and enable them to continue. These factors apply at home and abroad and, when successfully accomplished, empower our operations. This communication is necessary in today's world, for as Clarke said after

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[2] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 137
[3] Clausewitz, *On War*, 89

Operation Iraqi Freedom, "You cannot have successful ongoing military operations without public support."[4]

But why must the military have its own communication strategy? Surely, since the military answers to the President and the State Department has lead on international actions, the military could just piggyback off of those. Unfortunately, that is not the case. "News is about change – events that shape our society and alter the way we live. Conflict is the essence of drama, and the dramatic makes news."[5] Inept or inactive day-to-day military communication allows the media to find gaps between political objectives and the military. Or social values and the military. Whatever the case, negative information is flowing to or being reinforced to the public. Also important to remember is that perceptions work from the bottom up, rather than the top down.

To be successful in the information sphere, you have to build a base. Once again, Clarke has a good description, "...any organization of any size...needs a wide base of support from which it can operate. Think of a house. A more solid foundation supports a larger house."[6] This reinforces the thought above that perceptions work from the bottom, or base, up. This means information and communications must be part of the basic plan, not an afterthought thrown in as a hastily assembled annex. This is not a new idea. As Kenneth Allard said, "In both ancient and modern warfare, you try to target any element that affects the competitive environment. Nowadays that means influencing the media, wherever and however possible."[7]

The media is the primary conduit through which the military can get its message out to all publics, be they hometown USA, deployed

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[4] Clarke, *Lipstick*, 61
[5] Andrew Boyd, *Broadcast Journalism*, (Jordan Hill, GBR: Focal Press, 2000), p 24.
[6] Clarke, *Lipstick*, 141
[7] Kenneth Allard, *Warheads Cable News And the Fog of War* (New York: US Naval Institute Press, 2006), 6.

military forces, foreign audiences or even the enemy. This is not something an *ad hoc* plan can accomplish successfully. At the very least, failing to plan for working with the media and developing an information plan will hamper a military operation. While not a traditional strongpoint of the military, this was recognized by senior leaders. According to Clarke, "Even before 9/11 and certainly after, Secretary Rumsfeld and most of the Pentagon's senior leadership shared one of [Clarke's] most strongly held beliefs: the American people deserve to know as much as possible about their military. What its objectives are, how it's performing—the good, the bad, and the ugly."[8] That certainly helps generate popular will and support and as this thesis will discuss in later chapters, that support can prove vital in strategic and operational success or failure.

Complicating this equation is just how to define the media. In the past, it was the traditional media of newspapers, radio and television. In today's world, the definition has expanded to include citizen-journalists, such as bloggers and the new media, which has the potential to spread news and information much further than planned.[9]

Equally problematic, because of "…the aging population (one thousand World War II veterans die every day) and the limited number of military conflicts, few people outside the 'immediate family' had any interest in or knowledge of the armed forces. That might be okay if nothing bad happened…"[10] Unfortunately, the military is not in a business where nothing bad happens. Therefore, there is less knowledge of and experience with the military in general, which makes it more difficult to get the message out, especially in a way that accurately reflects and complements whatever the overarching strategy is.

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[8] Clarke, *Lipstick*, 56
[9] Air Force Document (AFD) 090406-036, New *Media and the Air Force*, April 2009, 2
[10] Clarke, *Lipstick*, 135

Ironically, during this time, actual coverage of military events has steadily increased. While fewer than 30 reporters went ashore during the invasion of Normandy on 6 June, 1944, over 500 appeared soon after operations began in Grenada in 1983 and in Panama in 1989. Moreover, there were over 1,600 media personnel in the AOR at the start of Operation Desert Storm in 1991.[11] Since then, media interest has continued to grow, culminating in the embed program during Operation Iraqi Freedom in which over 700 members of the media embedded themselves with military units, accompanying them into battle and reporting in near real-time.[12]

While that certainly is a drop in overall numbers and would appear to mean less coverage, the pool program of Desert Storm essentially nullified many of those 1,600 reporters while embedding in Operation Iraqi Freedom meant that each of those 700 reporters was reporting actively on operations, thereby increasing the sheer amount of news being reported. Another crucial difference relating to this new form of media interaction is that "… embedding was a military strategy in addition to a public affairs one. We had to keep other Middle Eastern regimes out of the conflict. If false propaganda about American forces took hold, the so called Arab street—public opinion in the Arab world—might erupt. Regimes might well be overthrown, and other countries could be drawn into the war."[13] This demonstrates the importance of the information component and the role it can and does play. While some might look at the embed program simply as a way to tell the American people what their troops were doing, it was actually more than that. It helped counter false allegations, calm inflamed tensions, and perhaps even helped to hold the coalition together by ensuring timely, accurate

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[11] Barry E. Venable, The Army and the Media, *Military Review*, January-February 2002, 67
[12] Clarke, *Lipstick*, 64
[13] Clarke, *Lipstick*, 62

information to inform and counter the enemy's actions. While there were issues with some reporters breaking the ground rules[14], for the most part, the embedding program is considered a success by most parties. Additionally, there are times and operations when embedding is not appropriate. Instead of a catchall solution, embedding and this type of media interaction can be a valuable addition to a commander's toolkit.

For this program to work, for information usage to be effective, we must realize the value of information. As Allard notes, "…the new doctrine of information operations, which began with the objective of getting inside the news cycle—a goal every bit as important as penetrating the enemy's decision cycle, [which is] in turn the key to his or her mind and will.…the idea was to seize and maintain the initiative in telling one's own story while countering any negatives."[15] This is akin to Boyd's famous OODA loop and is another way of "out-turning" the enemy and forcing him to react to you.

And who are these spokespeople? Who are the frontline communicators? While the public affairs staff may head up the overall program, commanders often like their frontline troops to be the ones America and the world see. As Clarke said, "…a major premise behind the embedding program in Iraq was my conviction that our troops in the field were our best spokespeople."[16] This is yet another reason why we must plan the information campaign in advance, so we can disseminate the information through all levels, down to what Marine General Charles C. Krulak called the "strategic corporal." This means a corporal, most likely acting as a squad leader can, by his or her actions at the tactical

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[14] Notably Geraldo Rivera's discussion of an upcoming operation and drawing maps for the camera in Iraq and his carrying of a personal weapon in Afghanistan, all of which violated the basic ground rules set forth for media embedded with military units.
[15] Allard, *Warheads*, 66
[16] Clarke, *Lipstick*, 165

level, make a strategic impact.[17] A clear example of this was the Abu Ghraib prison scandal when relatively junior soldiers acted irresponsibly and without regard for the higher order effects of their actions. And when the world-wide press broadcast the pictures these soldiers took of

Figure 1: Abu Ghraib prison photo (US Army)

themselves abusing prisoners, it was not only an embarrassing incident for the US Army but had the potential to cause riots, protests, and drive even more Iraqis toward the insurgency. In the United States, polls taken following the Abu Ghraib revelations showed that public assessments about the war plummeted to their lowest levels with just 46% believing the war was going well, the first time that less than a majority of Americans have felt that things in Iraq were going at least "fairly well." [18] Additionally, overseas, attention to reports of abuses at Abu Ghraib "…is high across all major industrialized countries, nearly every German interviewed (98%) says they have heard of the prison abuse. That compares with about 90% in other Western European countries and Japan, and 76% in the US Among Muslim publics, sizable majorities in Egypt (80%), Jordan (79%), and Turkey (68%) have heard of the prison abuse reports. But public attentiveness is far lower in Indonesia (28%) and Pakistan (21%)."[19] While these numbers would be fantastic for a positive event, they are not as desirable when bad news hits. Isolated actions by a small group of people had the potential to subvert, sabotage, or undermine US will and actually to increase anti-US will. Bad decisions

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[17] Charles C. Krulak, "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War," *Marines Magazine* (January 1999), http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm, (accessed 16 February 2009)
[18]   Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Iraq Prison Scandal Hits Home, But Most Reject Troop Pullout, 12 May 2004," Pew Research Center, http://people-press.org/report/213/iraq-prison-scandal-hits-home-but-most-reject-troop-pullout
[19] Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 13 2006, http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=827

in an isolated location had global repercussions because of the instant worldwide coverage they generated.

Josh Manchester, a former Marine who served in Iraq, discusses the importance of the junior NCO, saying, "In many cases, the individual Marine will be the most conspicuous symbol of American foreign policy and will potentially influence not only the immediate tactical situation, but the operational and strategic levels as well. His actions, therefore, will directly impact the outcome of the larger operation..."[20]

Ultimately, the most important communication takes place at the tactical level, be it media communication or communication between a serviceman and the local population. Strategic level communications and briefings can give an overview of the situation, but eventually, just as with politics, all communication is local, or tactical. This is the level where many decisions are made and where the bulk of the action takes place.

This is why the information component matters. One person can influence the will of many others. This is especially true in current counterinsurgency operations, where "people are a critical consideration for any successful COIN effort, and their support is essential to support the government and deny legitimacy for the cause of the insurgents."[21] Clausewitz said that one part of his trinity is the people.[22] Alternatively, we can view these people as one leg of a three-legged stool. Without public support, the stool is bound to collapse. How these people believe, behave, and support the government, the army and the war is dependent upon their will. Without it, we lose the people. Without the people, we lose the war.

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[20] Josh Manchester, "The Strategic Corporal vs. The Strategic Cameraman," *Small Wars Journal Blog*, entry posted on 8 May 2007, http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2007/05/the-strategic-corporal-vs-the/ (accessed 16 February 2009).
[21] Joseph D. Celeski, *Operationalizing COIN, JSOU Report 05-2* (Hurlburt Field: The JSOU Press, September 2005), 31.
[22] Colin S. Gray, *Fighting Talk: Forty Maxims on War, Peace, and Strategy (Westport*, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 89.

Noted strategist Colin Gray said that "...war and peace is really a mind game..."[23] This is a great insight and one that neatly sums up and supports his proposition. As Clausewitz wrote, war is "...an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."[24] We do this in two ways. One option is to cloud our adversaries' situational awareness, understanding, and judgment. A prime example of this was the reports and stories on the Marines off the Kuwaiti coast during Desert Storm. Media coverage of their presence and capabilities highlighted the possibility that the Marines might stage an amphibious landing, thereby drawing off Iraqi forces and attention. Additionally, through kinetic and non-kinetic means, we can compel the adversary to adopt a course of action favorable to our desired end-state. Deploying nuclear capable bombers for example, sends a very strong message. The same is true for carrier task groups sitting off the coast. Both can be used to send a message to "comply with resolutions/or wishes, or suffer the consequences." Essentially, it comes down to making people do what we want them to do and we achieve this by destroying the enemy's power of resistance, which Clausewitz defined as "...the total means at his disposal and the strength of his will."[25]

Thus, the focal point of warfare remains the will of the people. If we can convince our enemy that his struggle is hopeless and his situation improves by agreeing to our demands or conforming to our ideals, we will have a much easier chance of winning. Ultimately, we defeat our enemy psychologically, for as Clausewitz said, "...psychological forces exert a decisive influence on the elements involved in war."[26] As has often been argued, and to paraphrase Alfred Thayer Mahan, lesser soldiers with good weapons can often be beaten by better or more highly

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[23] Gray, *Fighting Talk:,* 96.
[24] Clausewitz, *On War,* 75.
[25] Clausewitz, *On War,* 77.
[26] Clausewitz, *On War,* 127.

motivated soldiers with lesser weapons.[27] While this may not always be true, in many cases of equal or near-equal forces, motivation can play a pivotal role. It can even do so in cases with huge differences, such as in Vietnam where the United States clearly outmatched the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army, yet still lost.

Another dimension in the struggle of wills involves the factors motivating friendly forces. Soldiers involved in a war they view as legitimate and worthwhile tend to be more mission and service focused. As Max Boot relates, reenlistment rates in Bosnia and Kosovo, the only combat-like operations at the time he wrote, were the highest in the Army.[28] This continues to hold true in the current conflict.[29] Conventional wisdom may suggest that those involved in combat operations might not be inclined to reenlist and remain in harm's way. Yet, this evidence demonstrates the psychological reinforcement available to friendly forces and helps make them stronger. A powerful army without a strong will to carry out its operations provides little utility to its nation and offers little resistance to the enemy. The same powerful army, with moral and psychological strength behind it, can achieve the most challenging of objectives.

The battle for this will, these moral factors, is why the information component is so important. Someone is going to tell the story about military operations. The key is to ensure that our story becomes the dominant narrative. This requires a proactive approach to information and communications. As Clarke states, "There's a huge vacuum of information out there, and if you're not doing your best to fill it, others…will."[30] More importantly, it is more than just taking a proactive

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[27] Gray, *Fighting Talk:,* 96.
[28] Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 342.
[29] Dave Moniz, "Soldiers re-enlist beyond US goal," *USA Today,* 17 July 2005, http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-07-17-soldiers-re-enlist_x.htm (accessed 14 April 2009).
[30] Clarke, *Lipstick,* 127

approach. These operations need to be well thought out and planned; otherwise, one could end up with a very negative result. "This was the practical side of 'information operations,' the understanding that information had become so fundamental to warfare that to neglect it like a toddler left unattended beside a busy highway was to guarantee that disaster had also not been left to chance. Instead what the Soviets had once called "active measures" were called for, not just to "spin" a story but to shape the larger environment where the whole yarn would be received, believed, and acted upon."[31]

Once again, this has everything to do with setting the conditions for victory. Information is one of the most important components of any military operation and its proper use can lay the groundwork, or set the conditions, before an operation begins. Without it, gaining the peoples' trust and support is at best difficult; at worst, impossible. This applies to one's own people as well as enemy and neutral populations. This is true even once a military operation has begun. Support can erode, morale can fade, and public sentiment can turn against the operation and the government. We now turn to an examination of three case studies where information played a crucial role in the success or failure of operations.

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[31] Allard, *Warheads*, 75

Chapter Two

The Berlin Airlift

Figure 2: 1st Lt Gail Halvorsen, the Berlin Candy bomber.
(Official US Air Force photo)

Figure 3: BERLIN AIRLIFT, 1948. An American C-54 transport aircraft about to land at Templehof airport during the Berlin Airlift, 1948. © Henry Ries / The New York Times / DHM.

Background

The Soviet blockade of Berlin from June 1948 to May 1949 and the subsequent Western airlift into the beleaguered city was one of the first and most crucial events of the Cold War. This event, which captured worldwide attention provided an opportunity for the West to stand up to the Soviets, and by winning the confrontation, gave the West greater resolve to win the Cold War. Berlin, the former capital of Nazi Germany, was deep in the Soviet Zone of occupation, but was divided into zones mirroring the post-war division of Germany itself, with French, British, Soviet and American forces each taking a portion of the city, dividing it into East and West. To some, especially those in the West, West Berlin was as a bastion against the Soviets and their East German puppets. To others, such as the Soviets, it appeared to be a temporary inconvenience they had to remove. In any event, the city became a location ripe for political and military showdowns and remained so for over 40 years.

All travel to West Berlin had to go through or over the Soviet Zone of Occupation. The Soviets had caused a small crisis in April of 1948 when, in an attempt to force their will upon the Western Allies, they began a mini-blockade of Berlin, to which the United States responded with a small airlift. This crisis soon passed, but the Soviets learned the wrong lessons. They concluded that this miniature airlift had been ineffective.[1] Combined with Soviet experiences fighting the Germans at Stalingrad, where the Germans were not able to resupply their beleaguered forces by air, this gave the Soviets the idea that by isolating Berlin, they could cause the Western Allies to reverse their decisions and

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[1] Roger G. Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000)., 23

cave in to Soviet desires. It was not just the Soviets that were delusional though. Even after this mini crisis, many Western leaders simply could not believe the Soviets would blockade Berlin because doing so would have such a negative effect on public opinion, especially German public opinion, which the Soviets were trying to woo.[2]

The Soviets again harassed the Allies by stopping coal trains on June 10, and then eventually suspending all traffic and travel through their zone on June 22. This isolated the Western part of Berlin from its sources of food and coal. Luckily, however, three air corridors remained open and the Western Allies began a massive humanitarian operation to feed the 2,500,000 people living in the Western zone of Berlin in an operation lasting from June 1948 to September 1949.[3]

The Berlin crisis provided the perfect opportunity for the West to prove its resolve both by its humanitarian role-- airlifting supplies into the city-- and in its deterrence role with the deployment of B-29s, the only nuclear delivery vehicle then in existence, to Europe. While both of these options were powerful, the only way truly to save the city was through airlift, which not only involved a massive humanitarian relief operation, but also had the added benefit of demonstrating that the West was right and that good could, and would, triumph over evil.

Airlift: The Softer Side of Information

While the Airlift was a national, indeed an international, undertaking, the bulk of the work fell upon the newly formed United States Air Force. As tensions increased prior to the actual blockade, US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) requested additional Public Information

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[2] W. Phillips Davison, *The Berlin Blockade – A Study in Cold War Politics* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1980), 375

[3] Headquarters, United States Air Forces in Europe, Berlin Airlift, A USAFE Summary (Ramstein AB, Germany, USAFE Reproduction Center 1949), v

Office (PIO) personnel to offset the requirements that were sure to be coming.[4]

This was necessary because baseless rumors, gossip, and the general lack of information contributed to a large number of dependents returning to the United States, which the press picked up and reported. This had the unfortunate effect of creating a war scare, which not only heightened tensions, but also made actual operations that much more difficult. The PIO focused its information efforts at this time on calming US military dependents' tensions in order to allow a better focus on the military mission.[5]

Later, during the actual operations, PIO shifted to an operations-based strategy of communicating with varied publics, from those in the US, to the Germans and of course to the men and women working the airlift itself.

The first major information challenge occurred within a week of the airlift's initiation, when Soviet-backed German papers began putting out a large number of anti-West stories that ridiculed the airlift and cast doubt not only upon its ability to supply Berlin but even upon the Allies' willingness and commitment to remain in Berlin and Europe. This had the effect of lowering German morale, and if left un-countered, could have had disastrous effects upon the future of West Germany and the alliance.[6]

This is when the information component had to go proactive, and it did, with PIO personnel inviting German journalists, photographers, and radio reporters to visit the airlift bases and fly aboard the missions, to see firsthand that the Western Allies were telling the truth and were

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[4] USAFE, 156
[5] USAFE, 156
[6] USAFE, 156

committed to the operation. This effort later expanded to include Allied newsmen, broadening the audience to the world via the wire services. Additionally, the airlift was considered "open" and thousands of visitors, from German citizens to State Department groups to international press visited the airlift bases, at all times of day and throughout the operation, which highlighted both the openness and scope of the effort. The very first such "open house" in September attracted nearly 15,000 Germans, and the open houses only got larger.[7] These efforts had a twofold effect. First, it reassured the German people that the airlift was working. Second, it-undermined people's faith in those Soviet backed papers that said it could not be done.[8]

The internal audience-- the aircrews, maintainers, loading crews, and others-- were also a focus of the information campaign. Here, the information component served to unite them in the mission and cooperation. This effort ranged from the daily task force newsletter, the Task Force Times, to publicly publishing tonnage figures for various units, which helped increase the leading unit's pride while spurring other units on to greater effort. This included the German workers who loaded and unloaded the aircraft.[9] These actions not only had the somewhat nebulously measured benefit of increasing the German's morale and appreciation for the West, but the operational benefit of increasing their work efforts, speeding the loading and unloading of aircraft to near unbelievable rates.

One man's difference

There is probably no better symbol, no more effective message of the Berlin Airlift, than that of Gail Halvorsen, the candy bomber. His one-man quest to give the children of Berlin small treats made front-page

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[7] W. Phillips Davison, *The Human Side of the Berlin Airlift*, RAND Report P-1224 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 3 December 1957), 22.
[8] USAFE, 156-157
[9] Davison, *The Human Side of the Berlin Airlift*, , 16-17

headlines and spread throughout the airlift, increasing public awareness of the mission and the plight of the Berliners while also humanizing both the Berliners and their saviors.[10] Halvorsen, at the time a 1st Lt, began this effort on his own initiative after visiting with children in Berlin and, embarrassed that he had no candy to offer them, promised to drop some candy the next day as he flew over. His initial efforts were small, consisting of candy bars tied to handkerchiefs, but his unit soon began participating and within a few weeks, Operation "Little Vittles" was born. It received so much attention that soon thousands of pounds of candy and little parachutes with which to drop it poured in from the United States. The operation continued to grow and evolve after Halvorsen departed Europe.[11]

Little Vittles was not the only goodwill gesture the Allies undertook. Many organizations adopted orphanages, held parties for children, or simply did their best to make life a little better for Berlin's children.[12] While these actions were not conducted under official PIO actions or part of an information campaign, they nonetheless served a purpose in that regard. There is no way to measure German morale, but it is undeniable that it increased and that these efforts also tied the airlifters and the people of the Western nations into the effort.

However, this initiative was not limited to individual acts. Early in the operation, Air Force leaders recognized the value of public relations and made sure to include writers and reporters in the action, a practice that continues to this day. As General William Tunner said, this operation had "…terrific public relations potential…this is the greatest opportunity we have ever had…"[13] While Tunner may have been speaking specifically about air transport, it is a statement that applies equally to the West's

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[10] Miller, *To Save a City*, 105-106
[11] Davison, *The Human Side of the Berlin Airlift,* 22-24
[12] Davison, *The Human Side of the Berlin Airlift,* 24-25
[13] Miller, *To Save a City,*. 193

larger efforts. The airlift, with all its attendant publicity, was "...a disaster for Joseph Stalin and his foreign policies...providing graphic evidence of Soviet ruthlessness and inhumanity."[14] More importantly, it helped swing American public opinion towards an alliance with Western European nations, something that was not predestined before the blockade and hugely successful airlift.[15]

B-29s: Not Subtle, Not Easy to Ignore

While the airlift looms large when thinking about the Berlin crisis, the B-29 deployment was just as important. Roger Miller suggested that the deployment of these bombers would show the Soviets "...that the West meant business."[16] Miller states this deployment was a serious demonstration of American commitment and showed that the United States was dedicated to the defense of Western Europe.[17] The United States had a nuclear monopoly and had twice demonstrated the effect of the bomb on Japanese cities. Even suggesting their use was a serious and unmistakable message. That these planes were not actually the nuclear-capable version is immaterial, as the bulk of the world's population, and perhaps even the majority of Soviet leadership, did not know this. The deployment was a good example of using the carrot-and -stick approach to the information campaign. The airlift garnered much of the publicity with its softer side. However, in the late 1940s there was no stronger message than the atomic bomb and a public deployment of B-29s. Additionally, it is not unthinkable that the B-29s were also deployed to help Allied morale. Offner claims that "In sum, the B-29s were sent more to bolster the US public and the British— keep them from "appeasement"—than to threaten the Soviets, whose behavior did not change, although the US planes may have been an additional

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[14] Miller, *To Save a City*, 187
[15] Miller, *To Save a City*, 187-188
[16] Miller, *To Save a City*, 46
[17] Miller, *To Save a City*, 46

deterrent to the Soviets' seriously escalating the crisis by challenging US planes in Berlin's air corridors."[18]

Saving a City and Strengthening the West

The majority of the Western world saw the airlift as a good deed and a chance to help make the world better. Of course, to a cynic, the airlift was not so much about feeding people and saving lives as about denying the Soviets a win. If people happened to benefit from this operation, so much the better. This airlift was an opportunity to combat the Soviets while at the same time spreading the gospel and righteousness of the West.[19] However, to the people of the West, especially those in West Berlin, it was much more than that. It was a sign of America's commitment to their freedom and well-being.

The information component played a vital role in this effort and while the airlift might still have succeeded without it, the use of information, whether through skill with the PIO or luck as with Little Vittles, was crucial to its overwhelming success. "The mass media played an important part in the development of Berlin's resistance spirit and of world opinion in support of the Berliners."[20] Davison points out the crucial link that information, relayed through the media, played in deflecting communist aggression and how it gave people, especially the Berliners, an emotional stake in the operation. Additionally, he points how this glut of information dispelled and nullified communist propaganda. Instead of panic and defeatism, and the resulting lessening of willpower and resolve on the parts of the Germans and the countries supporting them, the communists faced a well-informed and motivated

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[18] Arnold A. Offner. *Another Such Victory : President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-1953.* (Palo Alto, CA, USA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p 259.
[19] Miller, *To Save a City,* 193
[20] Davison, *The Berlin Blockade,* 376

opposition.[21] This opposition, revolved around a deep mistrust of the Soviets and belief in the basic evil of the Soviet system, feelings that would last through the end of the Cold War.

In the end, the twin messages of deterrence and humanity helped the United States, and the West, triumph in the Berlin blockade, which became the foundation for all future Cold War ideological battles. The campaign's effectiveness, especially of its information component and its portrayal of the stalwart good guys of the West and their need to join together against the "evil empire," as Ronald Reagan later and famously referred to the Soviet Union, helped steer the United States permanently away from any lingering thoughts of isolationism and led to the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.[22]

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[21] Davison, *The Berlin Blockade*, 376-277
[22] Miller, *To Save a City*, 190

Chapter Three

Vietnam

Figure 4: Nguyen Ngoc Loan, South Vietnam's national police chief executing a Viet Cong prisoner. (Photo by Eddie Adams, 1968, reprinted from photosthatchangedtheworld.com).
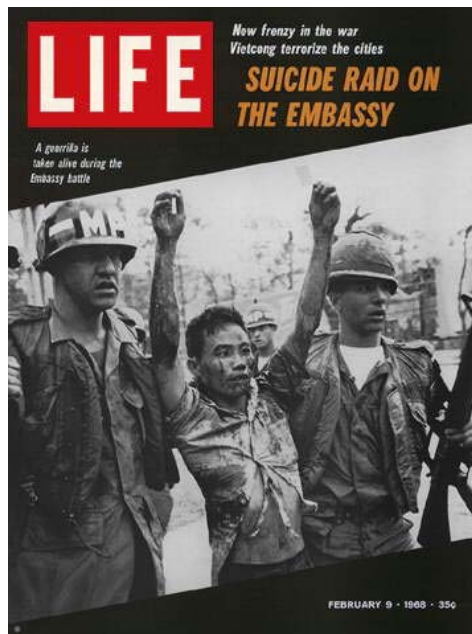

Figure 5: Life Magazine, February 1968. (Reprinted from Life.com)

Newsmen are supposed to report events, not influence or precipitate them....many a newsman tried to usurp the diplomat's role in formulating foreign policy

- General William C. Westmoreland

Charlie has hit every major military target In Vietnam, and hit 'em hard. In Saigon, the United States Embassy has been overrun by suicide squads. Khe Sahn is standing by to be overrun. We also have reports that a division of N.V.A. has occupied all of the city of Hue south of the Perfume River. In strategic terms, Charlie's cut the country in half... the civilian press are about to wet their pants and we've heard even Cronkite's going to say the war is now unwinnable. In other words, it's a huge shit sandwich, and we're all gonna have to take a bite.

- Lt Lockhart, Full Metal Jacket

...it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.

- Walter Cronkite

If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost Middle America

- President Lyndon Johnson

Background

Direct US involvement in Vietnam began with the establishment of a four-man Military Assistance Advisory Group in August 1950.[1] This involvement grew and changed over the next 22 years as the US became more and more involved in direct combat actions.

The US government did not fully or actively publicize these activities in the initial years, but as the American commitment to combat operations increased, and more Americans became casualties, reporters

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[1] John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 118.

began covering the war more and more. Additionally, a new form of reporting was emerging: television.

Television reporting had the capability to bring the war home to people across the world, quickly and graphically. War news was no longer a matter of filing wire reports that people saw in the next day's newspaper at best and sometimes not at all. Instead, the television and broadcast media brought events from around the world home with incredible speed. "Television presented special problems…[it] brought war into the American home, but in the process television's unique requirements contributed to a distorted view of the war. The news had to be compressed and visually dramatic. Thus the war that Americans saw was almost exclusively violent, miserable, or controversial…"[2] However, it was more than just this new medium of television. Vietnam was a complex insurgency, not a "cut-and–dried" conventional war. The weak government of South Vietnam (GVN) was combating an internal insurgency supported by external powers, including North Vietnam, Russia and China. Additionally, competing factions within the GVN made it nearly impossible to combat the Viet Cong with a unified front. Explaining the situation to the American people was a complicated endeavor, which resulted in many people now knowing the reasons why the US was involved.

As General William C. Westmoreland, commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) from 1964-1968 and later Army Chief of Staff said, "with television for the first time bringing war into living rooms and with no press censorship, the relationship of the military command in South Vietnam and the news media was of unusual importance."[3] Unfortunately, he said this in his memoirs well after the end of the war. The relationship between the military and the media was

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[2] William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1976), 420
[3] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* 419

not a very good one and more importantly, an overall campaign plan for conducting the information side of operations was not part of the process. Instead of a concerted, focused effort devoted to building public support, increasing troop morale, and countering and destroying enemy propaganda and will, the American and South Vietnamese conducted *ad hoc* engagements of no strategic value, and generally adopted a laissez faire approach to information. As Westmoreland said, again in his memoirs, "North Vietnam spoke with one controlled voice, the Americans and South Vietnamese used many, not always well orchestrated."[4] In Vietnam, reporters were free to roam the country and while there were regular press conferences scheduled, they soon earned the nickname of the "Five O'clock Follies" for their general lack of information and usefulness.

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong on the other hand relied upon the information component to strengthen their cause. "The lack of real progress against the Americans and the ARVN, despite …vast sacrifices, was seriously hurting morale. While it was clear that support for the war was waning among the American public and inside the Johnson administration, the Hanoi leaders knew that they could not hope to win the war as it was presently being fought. They needed some great, shocking triumph. They needed a second Dien Bien Phu."[5]

Knowing they could not defeat the United States militarily in force-on-force actions, they had to seek an asymmetric advantage. In this case, "the most important prize for the North was the erosion of the will of the American people to sustain support for the Administration's military policy in Vietnam."[6] The means to their end would be a general offensive conducted during the Vietnamese Tet holiday of 1968.

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[4] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* 421

[5] Anthony James Joes, *War for South Viet Nam, 1954-1975 : Revised Edition* (Westport, CT, USA: Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated, 2001), p 95.

[6] Alan Hooper, *Military and the media (*Aldershot, Hants, England: Gower, 1982), 113.

Tet, 1968

While originally planned to promote a general uprising in the South, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong could not have chosen a more fortuitous time to launch what became in essence – and in many ways by serendipity - an information operation backed by serious firepower.[7] Mounting American casualties over the previous years and graphic reporting of combat were mobilizing the American public against the war and deteriorating the public's faith in President Johnson. Anti-war protests were happening more frequently, with an estimated 100,000 demonstrators marching on the Pentagon in October of 1967. Against this backdrop, President Johnson ordered a belated information campaign to turn the tide and garner more support for the war and the administration.[8]

Johnson called General Westmoreland back to the United States, and in an optimistic series of meetings with reporters, the MACV commander said he was encouraged by the war's progress, that the end of the war was in sight and victory was near.[9] These comments helped to calm the American public, but could not have been better timed for the North Vietnamese.

The North Vietnamese had abandoned Giap's protracted war strategy and were hoping for a decisive offensive to create a popular uprising and break the stalemate in the South. Additionally, timing the attack for the Tet holiday would catch the country off guard and out of sorts as people travelled to visit with relatives.[10] Moreover, besides the decisive military attack, a secondary purpose was evident in the

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[7] The "serendipity" part is important because the North Vietnamese won the strategic victory, but not at all in the way they'd envisioned. They lost militarily, there was no popular uprising in the south, and the VC was largely destroyed. However, the American public turned decisively against the war, yet not for the reasons the North Vietnamese envisioned. In fact, they sought military victory more than they sought to undermine American public support.

[8] James H. Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive A Concise History (*New York: Columbia UP, 2006), 6

[9] Willbanks, *Tet Offensive*, 7

[10] Willbanks, *Tet Offensive*, 10

"...[North's] heavy emphasis on dramatic results in populated areas seemed to indicate as well as desire to have some sort of psychological impact on world opinion."[11] This was to be a truly dramatic offensive designed to defeat the South and the Americans on two levels, militarily and in terms of morale.

The full offensive began early in the morning of 31 January, when over 80,000 Communist troops attacked targets throughout South Vietnam. The initial results were stunning, catching the South Vietnamese and the Americans off guard, despite intelligence warnings that the offensive was near.[12] The bloody battles that raged throughout the country were ammunition for the information war. Moreover, despite the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong losing thousands of soldiers during the offensive as well as losing all of their short-term gains, the attack worked on the information level, as American confidence in the country's leadership, military, and war effort, was severely shaken.

Reactions to Tet

"In retrospect, I believe that I and officials in Washington should have tried to do more to alert the American public to the coming of a major offensive," said Westmoreland.[13] This is somewhat of an understatement as an unprepared public was literally shocked by the size and scope of the Vietnamese offensive, especially since just months before they had been told the end was in sight. "...The offensive seemed to many in direct contradiction to President Johnson's campaign to demonstrate progress in the war, a refutation of my remarks at the Press Club two months earlier."[14]

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[11] William M. Hammond, United States Army in Vietnam, Public Affairs (Washington DC, US Government Printing Office, 1987), 344
[12] Willbanks, *Tet Offensive,* 30-31
[13] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* 321
[14] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* 321

The fighting was undeniably fierce, with North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces making bold moves, taking portions of cities such as Hue and even breaching the walls of the US embassy in Saigon. This attack specifically, through its visual representation to the American public, serves as a good example of how the information campaign went against the Americans and South Vietnamese and played into the North's favor.

While a team of sappers had indeed breached the embassy walls and entered the compound, they never made it into any of the buildings nor truly exploited their success before being killed by the embassy's defenders. However, the building had been damaged, combat had taken place inside the epicenter of American representation in the country and the Great Seal of the United States had been damaged and fallen to the ground-- all very visible actions.[15] This was already an information victory for the Viet Cong as they had breached the secure walls. However, it was to get worse.

Westmoreland soon visited the embassy and presented a calm demeanor, undoubtedly intended to show that the situation was well in hand and the American forces would soon quell this offensive. However, "if Westmoreland was calm, the Saigon correspondents were aghast. Centering their attention on the fighting most accessible to them, the battle for the US embassy in downtown Saigon, they turned the attacks into a cause célèbre…Unable to see what was actually happening, they took the word of people at the scene and incorrectly reported that the embassy had been taken."[16]

Westmoreland of course denied this. Unfortunately, he gave his press conference while standing in the ruins of the embassy. As Westmoreland recounts, he had no problem saying that the Viet Cong

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[15] Willbanks, *Tet Offensive*, 34-36
[16] Hammond, Army in Vietnam, 344

and North Vietnamese were courting military disaster. However, said amidst the battle-damaged ruins of the embassy, the reporters had trouble buying his statements and as Westmoreland says, "that attitude on the part of the American reporters undoubtedly contributed to the psychological victory the enemy achieved in the United States."[17]

Some believe that this inaccurate reporting assisted the North Vietnamese in their endeavors. "…Hanoi received the unwitting support of the media during the Tet offensive in 1968: 'The American media had misled the American public about the Tet offensive and when they realized they had misjudged the situation – that in fact it was an American victory – they didn't have the courage or the integrity to admit it.'"[18] It was also a matter of the North Vietnamese adapting their information campaign to take advantage of US and GVN missteps and media reporting. Of course, while the media may have been biased, and it could be biased in either direction, it was not the reporting that destroyed the public will, but the one-two punch of being told everything was going well and then seeing a massive offensive unfold just two months later.

Additionally, this problem was a result of more than just reports of the offensive. It was quick, visual reporting, quite often not given in the proper context, which helped sway world opinion. Instead of seizing the information offensive, the Americans and South Vietnamese were forced to react to events. One such incident that symbolizes this type of occurrence is best recounted by Westmoreland,

> Unfortunately, on the second day of the fighting, an act of one South Vietnamese and the chance recording of it by still and television cameras handed the VC another psychological triumph that obscured the valor and determination that the Saigon police and ARVN troops displayed throughout the struggle in the city. In the course

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[17] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* 325

[18] William Westmoreland Guardian interview 4 April 1979, in Alan Hooper, *Military and the media (*Aldershot, Hants, England: Gower, 1982)113.

of the fighting near the An Quang pagoda, the chief of the National Police, Nguyen Ngoc Loan, summarily executed a VC prisoner with a shot in the head from his revolver. A still photographer, Eddie Adams, tripped his shutter just as the bullet slammed into the prisoner's head. An NBC television camera also recorded the event. The photograph and the film shocked the world, an isolated incident of cruelty in a broadly cruel war, but a psychological blow against the South Vietnamese nonetheless.[19]

Of course, even Westmoreland's description does not give the entire story. The executed prisoner had been caught just after killing several ARVN soldiers and their families. The city was under martial law and the police chief executed the prisoner on the spot. This context was never explained and the stand-alone photo and video of the shooting instead spoke for themselves, further alienating US public support.

The truly ironic part of the reporting on the Tet offensive and the shift in mood was that the Americans and South Vietnamese had actually defeated the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese in all the battles and effectively destroyed Viet Cong. As Westmoreland recounts in his memoirs, "in the few weeks since the start of the offensive, much had taken place for the better in Vietnam: the enemy's heavy losses; markedly improved morale and confidence in the ARVN; firm moves by the government to bolster the ARVN, care for refugees..."[20]

This feeling permeated the American command structure. On February 1, 1968, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle Wheeler told CBS evening news that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had lost so many men that the offensive had to be considered a failure. However, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara did say that while they may have failed militarily, they might still attempt to make this a moral

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[19] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* 328
[20] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* 354

victory for the North Vietnamese and a psychological defeat for the United States."[21]

Losing the war?

While it is unfair to blame the media itself for America's defeat in Vietnam, one could say, as Westmoreland himself did, that "press and television reporting on the Tet offensive had convinced many that the war was lost or could be brought to no satisfactory conclusion."[22] Once again, however, it was more than just the reports. It was the uncoordinated, incoherent, information campaign on the American/South Vietnamese side versus the coordinated, single-voice approach of the North. The media certainly played a role, as they were the conduit for all sorts of information from both sides. However, their role did not present the biggest issue.

As Hooper notes, "…probably most significant of all was the failure of many in the media to realize how they were being used by Hanoi to promote the North's propaganda. North Vietnam used the free press of democracy to turn the American people against the war and realized the immense potential of this 'gift' from democracy the moment the Americans entered the war."[23] While it may not have been instantaneous, it certainly did happen. It was not that the media only reported the North's messages, for they also disseminated American and South Vietnamese news. Instead, it was that the American/South Vietnamese did not attempt to take the initiative on the information front, instead choosing a reactive policy. Additionally, false promises and the shock brought on by the Tet offensive undermined American and South Vietnamese credibility. The final blow to credibility was when the New York Times published Westmoreland's supposedly top secret request

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[21] Hammond, Army in Vietnam, 347
[22] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 358-359
[23] Hooper, *Military and the media*, 113

for more troops, 206,000 in total, in March. This was after Westmoreland and Wheeler had assured the American public multiple times that the end was insight.[24] Combined with the still vivid images of the Tet offensive, this further served to further erode what little public trust and will remained.

The feelings of the media and the American public, which it represented, can be neatly summed up in Walter Cronkite's somewhat lengthy, but poignant, historic report upon his return from Vietnam.

> Tonight, back in more familiar surroundings in New York, we'd like to sum up our findings in Vietnam, an analysis that must be speculative, personal, subjective. Who won and who lost in the great Tet offensive against the cities? I'm not sure. The Vietcong did not win by a knockout, but neither did we. The referees of history may make it a draw. Another standoff may be coming in the big battles expected south of the Demilitarized Zone. Khe Sanh could well fall, with a terrible loss in American lives, prestige and morale, and this is a tragedy of our stubbornness there; but the bastion no longer is a key to the rest of the northern regions, and it is doubtful that the American forces can be defeated across the breadth of the DMZ with any substantial loss of ground. Another standoff. On the political front, past performance gives no confidence that the Vietnamese government can cope with its problems, now compounded by the attack on the cities. It may not fall, it may hold on, but it probably won't show the dynamic qualities demanded of this young nation. Another standoff.
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> We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds. They may be right, that Hanoi's winter-spring offensive has been forced by the Communist realization that they could not win the longer war of attrition, and that the Communists hope that any success in the offensive will improve their position for eventual negotiations. It would improve their position, and it would also require our realization, that we should have had all along, that any negotiations must be that -- negotiations, not the dictation of

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[24] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* 358

peace terms. For it seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate. This summer's almost certain standoff will either end in real give-and-take negotiations or terrible escalation; and for every means we have to escalate, the enemy can match us, and that applies to invasion of the North, the use of nuclear weapons, or the mere commitment of one hundred, or two hundred, or three hundred thousand more American troops to the battle. And with each escalation, the world comes closer to the brink of cosmic disaster.

To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past. To suggest we are on the edge of defeat is to yield to unreasonable pessimism. To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory, conclusion. On the off chance that military and political analysts are right, in the next few months we must test the enemy's intentions, in case this is indeed his last big gasp before negotiations. But it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.

This is Walter Cronkite. Good night.[25]

President Johnson's comment that if he had "…lost Cronkite, [he'd] lost middle America"[26] illustrates the impact of losing this information campaign. The intensity of the combat, contrasted with the administration's rosy predictions of being near to victory fatally hurt the American will for war. Reflecting the view of the war held by many in the United States and often contributing to it, the general tone of press and television comment was critical, particularly following the Tet offensive of 1968. As a respected Australian journalist, Denis Warner, has noted,

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[25] Willbanks, *Tet Offensive*, 205.
[26] Willbanks, *Tet Offensive*, 69

there are those for whom it was the first war in history lost in the columns of the *New York Times*.[27]

While saying that the war was lost in the columns of the *New York Times* might be a bit of a stretch, it is not an exaggeration to say that the lack of a comprehensive, coordinated information campaign on the part of the United States did severely hurt the cause. The US effort was a reactive one at best, responding to events instead of getting ahead. Moreover, the effort was uncoordinated and did not adjust as the war itself changed. Instead of changing to meet emerging requirements, especially in light of the Tet Offensive, any information campaign came across as either misleading, as with the need for more troops, or false, such as press conferences from the ruins of the embassy.

Additionally, while North Vietnam might not have had a comprehensive information plan, it was able to reap the benefits nonetheless, giving it a moral victory even when confronted by a staggering military loss. While the Tet Offensive was not planned as an information campaign, the North Vietnamese were able to adjust mid-operation in order to take advantage of the situation.

What Vietnam really demonstrated in regards to the information component was the importance of avoiding cognitive dissonance. The United States was not only fighting a war, it was fighting to define and then keep to a consistent message. Early in the conflict, President Kennedy, who had already approved combat troop deployments, answered with a simple "no" when asked if American troops were engaged in combat.[28] The fact that this was not true, and was borne out in later news reports began the process of widening the divide between official messages and reality. Combined with shifting messages about

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27 Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports,* 420
28 Daniel C. Hallin, *Uncensored War : The Media and Vietnam* (Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press, USA, 1986_, p 33.

the roles and nature of the US presence in Vietnam, and the reports coming from Vietnam that did not match those shifting messages, this created a schism between the American people and their government, which further eroded public support.

The North Vietnamese, and the Viet Cong, on the other hand, had a message that was relatively easy to keep consistent throughout the war. Their overarching message was that they would fight until Vietnam was unified. As long as they kept to this message and supported it on at least a small level with military and information actions, be they irregular or conventional, they did not need to worry about conflicting messages and losing their audience. Throughout this time, the Vietnamese people, especially those in the North required to support the war morally and physically, did not have to think about conflicting messages and disconnects between what their leaders said they wanted and reports from the field that may have differed.

Cognitive dissonance can occur easily if an operation does not have unifying theme or if leaders constantly shift the stated purpose of the operation. A more recent example can be seen in the Global War on Terror and Operation Iraqi Freedom. While many Americans understood why we were fighting the Global War On Terror (GWOT), some could not and did not put GWOT together with the invasion of Iraq. The result, while not the chaos of the Vietnam era, was nonetheless more widespread protests and anti-war movements than were seen in Operation Enduring Freedom, which the public understood was directly tied to the GWOT.

Chapter Four

The 1990s

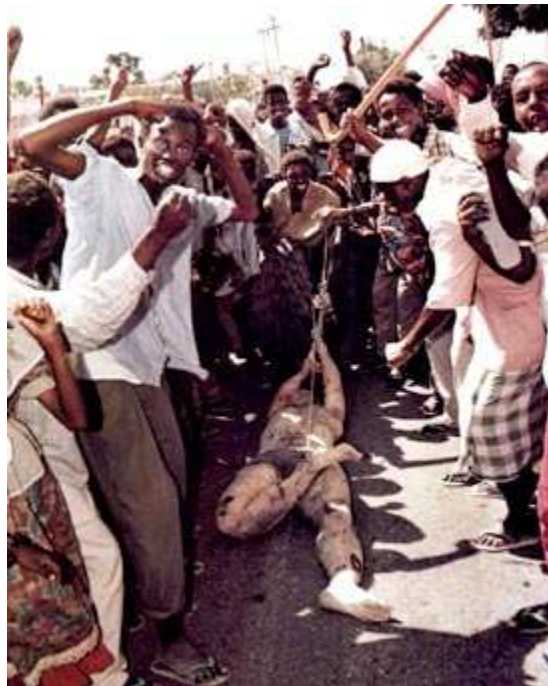Figure 6: Highway of Death. (Reprinted from news.bbc.co.uk)

Figure 7: Soldier's body being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, 1993.
(Reprinted from pdngallery.com)

We must start with policy and diplomatic overtures. We can't make a case for losing lives for Kuwait, but Saudi Arabia is different. I am opposed to dramatic action without the President having popular support.

- General Colin L. Powell, 2 August 1990

The great duel, the mother of all battles has begun. The dawn of victory nears as this great showdown begins!

- Saddam Hussein, 17 January 1991

Introduction

Following Vietnam, the United States military transformed from a draftee service to an All Volunteer Force. The military faced several crises in the post-Vietnam era and the distrust of the media was exceptionally high, with a large percentage of civilian and military leaders blaming the media for defeat.[1] Consequently, instead of determining ways in which to incorporate the media, and by extension the information component, the military pushed it to the side. This was highlighted in Operation Urgent Fury, the invasion of Grenada.

When 600 reporters arrived on Barbados to cover the operation, the military commanders did not know what to do. They had pushed all media dealings down to unit public affairs officers and had no plans for dealing with the media onslaught. Instead of using this as an opportunity to influence both friendly and enemy perceptions about the operation and to get key messages out, the military simply denied the media access to Grenada. This not only ensured negative, angry media reactions, but also more importantly, denied the military a chance to influence the media and the enemy.[2]

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[1] Frank Aukofer and William P. Lawrence, America's Team; The Odd Couple—A Report on the Relationship Between the Media and the Military (Nashville, TN: Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, 1995), 40.
[2] Aukofer and Lawrence, America's Team; The Odd Couple, 44.

Desert Storm

Grenada was a relatively quick operation with little to no buy-in needed from the American public. The military conducted it before the public even knew there was a problem. That would not be the case in the next major operation, Desert Storm. Instead of imposing unilateral censorship before and during the operation, the military used the information component to build support and justification for the war. As John MacArthur said, "muzzling the media during wartime was one thing. Using the media to start a war was quite another, though just as important to the White House."[3]

Building US Support

"In August 1990, the Bush Administration's task was to sell two images—an ugly one of Hussein and a handsome one of Kuwait—to the American media. Then, God willing, the media would help sell it to the American people."[4] This was based on the fact that prior to Desert Storm, the American public hardly thought of Saddam Hussein while the US government provided active support to his government during his war with Iran.[5] Luckily, for the plan, this was not well known, and following the August, 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the information forces were mobilized quickly in such a way as to ensure America would not only support a war, but want one. This was necessary because as Joseph Nye said, "…the absence of a prevailing warrior ethic in modern democracies means that the use of force requires an elaborate justification to ensure popular support, unless actual survival is at stake."[6] This operation began soon after the invasion when Kuwait hired Hill & Knowlton, a well-

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[3] John R. MacArthur, *Second front censorship and propaganda in the 1991 Gulf War* (Berkeley: University of California P, 2004) 37.

[4] MacArthur, *Second front censorship and propaganda,* 43.

[5] MacArthur, *Second front censorship and propaganda,* 37-40.

[6] Joseph Nye, *Soft Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 19.

known public relations firm, to drum up support for Kuwait and against Iraq. Hill & Knowlton began this endeavor by spreading information about Kuwait to the American public in an effort to build knowledge and support.[7]

However, information and knowledge about Kuwait were not enough. Despite the fact that Iraq invaded and another annexed country, and that Saddam was indeed a dictator, "If the campaign were to be successful, a real horror story would have to be written to arouse the wrath of America..."[8] One of the most visible aspects of this approach was President George H. Bush's frequent comparisons of Hussein to Hitler and the current situation to that of pre-World War II Europe.[9] The twin campaigns, one by Kuwait using the PR firm, and the other by the US government, did indeed garner substantial public support and even managed to convince the majority of the public that Desert Storm was justified and necessary.[10]

An important note here is that while the information campaigns were successful and did build public support, the aftermath was not positive. A large, post-war controversy was the fact that some of Hill & Knowlton's PR work was fabricated, most notably the stories about Iraqi soldiers plucking Kuwaiti babies from incubators and leaving them to die.,[11] It took time for journalists to discover that Nayirah the girl who testified to these atrocities, was actually the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador, coached for her performance, and without any first-hand knowledge. "But, by the time this was discovered the damage was already done: opinions had been formed based on her testimony and

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[7] MacArthur, *Second front censorship and propaganda,* 47-50.

[8] MacArthur, *Second front censorship and propaganda,* 51.

[9] MacArthur, *Second front censorship and propaganda,* 70-72.

[10] Alberto Bin, Richard Hill & Archer Jones, *Desert Storm: a forgotten war* (Westport, CT, Praeger, 1998), 137.

[11] Trevor Morris, *PR- A Persuasive Industry? : Spin, Public Relations and the Shaping of the Modern Media,* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, GBR: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). p 72.

action had been taken."[12] However, while the short-term goals were successful, over the long term, the public, and the media especially, grew more distrustful of these deceitful tactics.

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Information During War

It was more than just building support before the operation began though. The information component of operations, although not really planned for in a coherent, organized fashion, continued to play a role throughout the operation. Ironically enough, it was not the overwhelming greatness of the coalition's information plan so much as the sheer ineptitude of Iraq's that played the major role.

US Actions

One of the reasons the US was not very proactive on the information front was the continuing animosity from Vietnam and Grenada. Additionally, while the military had improved its performance capabilities, personnel, and weapons systems since Vietnam, it had not kept pace in terms of dealing with the media and information.[13] Moreover, "…the news media went into the war with no plan for coverage other than a vague notion that they would be able to roam the battlefields as a small number of reporters had done in Vietnam—an assumption, given the nature of the operation, that was unrealistic."[14] This was due to the media's failure to plan for the war. Instead, the media seemed to rely on glitz and glamour to sell its coverage: "…during the war it seemed that every television and network radio report was

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[12] Patricia J. Parsons, *Ethics in Public Relations : A Guide to Best Practice (2nd Edition).*(London, , GBR: Kogan Page, Limited, 2008), p 7.
[13] Aukofer and Lawrence, America's Team; The Odd Couple, 9.
[14] Aukofer and Lawrence, America's Team; The Odd Couple, 9.

accompanied by catchy synthesized tunes designed to excite and inspire the populace."[15]

It was not all about reactive information, though. Coalition leaders had a very real concern. If their troops did not strike by March 1991, they may have had to withdrawal some forces due to growing public impatience for action combined with lack of interest and competing requirements, with the result that "the Western public would lose interest. The Saudis and other Arab members of the coalition would begin to lose confidence in the West's resolve to take on Saddam."[16] Public support, although strong, was not guaranteed to last forever. This had the effect of ensuring the attacks would stick to the deadlines given to Hussein.

Iraqi Actions

In contrast to the Coalition, the Iraqis tried all manner of information operations, targeting their own forces, the Arab world, and the Coalition. Unfortunately, for the Iraqis, "it is a fact that Hussein was not a genius at molding public opinion. His first mistake after invading Kuwait—sealing off the country to reporters and human rights investigators—turned out to be critical to the success of the [US] Administration's public relations campaign. Hussein could not refute the charges made by Bush's people in part because some were true, but even more so because he wouldn't permit confirmation that some were not true."[17]

A perfect example of this was the Iraqi thought-process on air raids. The Iraqis believed that air attacks could and would serve two purposes, building support at home, as with the London Blitz, and providing "...a real opportunity to undermine the will to fight amongst

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[15] MacArthur, *Second front censorship and propaganda,* 85.
[16] Michael R., Gordon, *Generals' war the inside story of the conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 131.
[17] MacArthur, *Second front censorship and propaganda,* 52-53.

western public opinion about the rights and wrongs of the war, as had supposedly happened following the 1968 Tet Offensive in Vietnam."[18] To help facilitate this plan of action, the Iraqis gave CNN, considered an international news company, but ironically American owned, priority in Baghdad, ensuring the reporters and crews were allowed to stay in the city and had electrical power for their broadcast equipment. That is, until the Iraqis thought that CNN was no longer helpful.

Even so, the air raids were Iraq's primary means of conducting an information operations campaign. The bombing and inevitable captured pilots would be their ammunition. However, once again, and "…even on the one issue which the coalition most feared might provide Saddam with his greatest propaganda opportunity, namely 'collateral damage; the Iraqis invariably failed to provide watertight, verifiable and incontrovertible evidence to support their claims. Even when they occasionally did, they were unable to overcome two fundamental further problems: the coalition's skill at counter-propaganda and the resolve of public opinion in the West to see Saddam defeated."[19] For example, while the Iraqis alleged indiscriminant terror bombing, "…the coalition military machine began releasing spectacular video footage taken by cameras located on the noses of 'smart' weaponry as they glided with uncanny accuracy through the doors, windows and ventilation shafts of their intended targets before the screen went blank. Within ten days, CNN and other international news organizations were able to transmit live pictures of cruise missiles flying along the streets of Baghdad as though they were following an A-Z grid map of the city to hit their strategic – not civilian – targets."[20]

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[18] Philip M Taylor, *War and the Media Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (New York: Manchester UP, 1998), 89.
[19] Philip M Taylor, *War and the Media Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (New York: Manchester UP, 1998), 87-88.
[20] Philip M. Taylor *Munitions of the Mind : A History of Propaganda* (Manchester, , GBR: Manchester University Press, 2003) p 289.

Iraq tried to parade captured pilots, much like the Vietnamese did, who they forced to confess to "war crimes." Many of the pilots appeared to have been beaten. This sharply contrasted with the first videos of captured Iraqis, which showed them in good condition, and in fact those videos were not even released until a determination was made if they could even be shown under the terms of the Geneva Convention.[21] Instead of a win for the Iraqis and a lessening of Western resolve, those pictures of downed pilots produced anger in the American and Coalition audiences. "If Saddam had been attempting to exploit the Vietnam Syndrome to create public disaffection with the war effort, the apparently brutalized nature of the pilots merely caused fury and resentment and prompted calls for Saddam's treatment as a war criminal once the conflict was over."[22]

Perhaps the best example of Iraqi ineptitude in the field of information was the "Baghdad Betty" broadcasts. These radio broadcasts, in the mold of World War II Tokyo Rose radio shows, were renowned for suggesting to American service members that the women back home were dating Tom Cruise, Bruce Willis, and especially Bart Simpson. As one might imagine, these broadcasts were met with incredulity and may actually have increased American service members' morale.[23]

End of War (Highway of Death and 100 Hour War)

As stated above, despite little to no planning for the information side of the operation, Coalition leadership was nonetheless well aware of its necessity. One of the war's most vivid images, besides those of precision guided munitions flying down smokestacks and through

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[21] Philip M Taylor, *War and the Media Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (New York: Manchester UP, 1998),104-105
[22] Taylor, *War and the Media,* , 107.
[23] Philip M Taylor, *War and the Media,* 90.

windows, was that of the so-called "Highway of Death." Many thought that these images caused the Coalition to end the war prematurely. However, the photos did not come out until after the decision had already been made. Rather, it was the fear of the unintended consequences these images might produce that helped push a decision.

The West had the moral high ground and was destroying the Iraqi forces, first by air and then by land. The end was in sight, and while "the war might go on another day… at some point, Washington might be accused of butchering the Iraqis…"[24]

President Bush, to whom those remarks were attributed, was well aware of how quickly public opinion and support could turn. Additionally, General Colin Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was also aware and as a result, "…the campaign itself was curtailed directly as a result of fear of public reaction following live television coverage of events on the ground…the pictures of the "Highway of Death" had not appeared on American television screens before Powell took the initiative with his recommendation that offensive action be curtailed. It was the fear, not the reality, of adverse public reaction that guided Washington's decisions."[25] This is another example of cognitive dissonance, or at least the possibility that it would occur. American forces were in the Gulf to liberate the people of Kuwait from a dictator and his imposing military forces. Yet, the American people might instead have perceived a wholesale slaughter, which may have caused them to question the very nature of the operation.

This is one factor that drove the West to impose a cease-fire after only 100 hours of combat. The other factor was that a 100-hour war had a nice ring to it, at least in the West. While a 100-hour war would appeal

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[24] Michael R., Gordon, *Generals' war the inside story of the conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 414.

[25] H.P. Willmott, When *men lost faith in reason reflections on war and society in the twentieth century* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2002), 248-249.

to the Western public, showcasing the speed and power of the Coalition, especially the United States, it was somewhat of a PR blunder in the Arab world. While the American public would probably not care, the 100-hour war had nearly with the same duration as the British, French, and Israeli attack on the Suez Canal in 1956. That event was not a happy remembrance in the Arab world.[26] Associating this war with a war many Arab's felt was yet another invasion by the West and Israel could be considered counter-productive to both the end of the Gulf War and later attempts to work with Arab nations.

Nevertheless, a ceasefire was enacted at the 100-hour mark. In retrospect, this may have been a good thing as opposed to carrying the attack into Iraq. The Highway of Death, so labeled by the media, did become an issue and was made public. And the "public reaction to video of the carnage along the Highway of Death was so intense that there may have been almost no public support for occupying Iraq."[27]

Closing thoughts on Desert Storm

Desert Storm was by no means a good information component operation. While the United States and Kuwaiti government did a good, if not great job of ensuring public support for the war, the information campaign was not properly carried through to combat operations. True, the daily press briefings were effective and popular with the American public but nonetheless, the information component was not planned for in advance and factored into operations to best take advantage of its potential benefits.

Conversely, the Iraqis tried to engage with an information campaign and repeatedly came up short. Besides the basic bumbling of their military information campaign against the West, they failed on a more important front, their own people. Failure to build popular

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[26] Gordon, *Generals' war,* 424.
[27] Charles Jaco, *The Complete Idiot's Guide To the Gulf War* (Indianapolis: Alpha, 2002), 265.

support, as the West did, meant there was not the same amount of buy-in. While this may seem a moot point in a military dictatorship, the people still have to fight. "On the whole, it is clear that the Iraqi population did not have a determined will to hang on to Kuwait."[28]   This meant that instead of determined, dedicated soldiers, the Coalition faced thousands and thousands of Iraqis very eager to surrender.

In the end, Desert Storm was a big win for the United States military. However, some branches of the service did better than others in their own information campaign. "…The Army suffered a self-inflicted wound because so many of its commanders were hostile to press coverage. On the other hand, the Marine Corps received more than its share of the credit and glory because the Marine commander, Gen. Walt Boomer, had been the Corps' public affairs chief and knew how to deal with the news media."[29] While this may not seem like an aspect of information operations, it nonetheless had an effect on future operations, as more coverage equaled more public support, which did, and still does, translate into more funding.

Despite lost opportunities during the actual combat phase of Desert Storm, it can still be considered a good example of how to mold public support. Schiller sums it up the information component of Desert Storm in these terms, "In retrospect and on balance, the remarkable control of American consciousness during and after the war must be regarded as a signal [sic] achievement of mind management, perhaps even more impressive than the rapid military victory."[30]

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[28] Alberto Bin, Richard Hill & Archer Jones, Desert Storm: a forgotten war (Westport, CT, Praeger, 1998), 140.
[29] Aukofer and Lawrence, America's Team; The Odd Couple, 12.
[30] Herbert J. Schiller, "Manipulating Hearts and Minds," in Triumph of the Image, ed. Hamid Mowlana, et al (Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1992), 22.

Mogadishu

Introduction and Background

Less than two years after the conclusion of Desert Storm, the United States found itself in Somalia as part of a United Nations operation. This operation and the US mission, Operation Restore Hope, were set up to facilitate humanitarian aid to people trapped by civil war and famine. The mission eventually evolved into an attempt to help stop the conflict and reconstitute the basic institutions of a viable state. The country was torn by violence and suffering from a serious drought. By 1992, almost 4.5 million people, about half the total population suffered from starvation, severe malnutrition and related diseases. An estimated 300,000 people, including many children, died. Some 2 million people, violently displaced from their home areas, fled either to neighboring countries or elsewhere within Somalia. All institutions of governance and at least 60 per cent of the country's basic infrastructure disintegrated.[31]

Against this backdrop, the United Nations, and the United States, decided to act. Unlike Desert Storm, there was no massive information campaign to ensure support. However, then-President Bush did address the nation about the situation and nature of the mission. This helped to garner humanitarian, and congressional support and led to almost 75% of Americans supporting the operation.[32] However, this support was not to last.

Public support & Black Hawk Down

A study conducted on Restore Hope showed that "...a willingness to stay hinged on the belief that the United States had vital interests

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[31] United Nations, "Somalia – UNOSOM," United Nations, http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unosomi.htm (accessed 3 April 2009).
[32] Eric V. Larson, *American support for U.S. military operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2005), 30-31.

involved and good prospects for a successful outcome, whereas a preference for withdrawal was associated with a failure to see vital interests or good prospects in Somalia."[33]

Unfortunately, for American support, the mission in Somalia changed from a purely humanitarian mission with little like hood for causalities to a more combat-focused mission with no corresponding information plan to explain this to the people and to ensure support. This was to culminate in the intense combat surrounding the shooting down of two Blackhawk helicopters, the deaths of 18 US Army rangers in combat and the capture of a helicopter pilot on 3 October.

Yet, public support for the operation was already down before the October 3 firefight, with the majority of Americans favoring a withdrawal. The firefight simply solidified the desire for an immediate withdrawal of US forces. This was because few had bought into the reason the US was in Somalia which, when combined with the shift away from humanitarian operations to combat operations, led to a belief that the US had few interests in the area.[34] The shoot down of two helicopters, and more importantly, the visual images of dead American soldiers, were the catalysts. Michael Elliot likened the images of the dead American soldiers being dragged through the streets to the photograph, discussed in the previous chapter, of the Vietnamese police chief shooting the VC.[35] President Clinton, who had succeeded Bush had wanted a slow, determined pullout of US forces.

Predictably, however, in an environment that had not been shaped to accept such images and results, outrage and demands for action followed. In this case, the action involved rapid withdrawal. "Under such intense public and congressional pressure, [President] Clinton's determined pull-out...may have afforded the United Nations and innocent

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[33] Larson, *American support,* 37.

[34] Eric V. Larson, *American support,* 34-35

[35] Jonathan Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu testing U.S. policy in Somalia* (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 102

Somalis only an indecently short interval in which to rally."[36] Because he had no public support or buy-in, "as a result of October 3, Clinton had no more political currency to spend on Somalia."[37]

The United States withdrew from Somalia soon after this and the United Nations followed in 1995. One writer said, "the loss of public support for US involvement in Somalia following the abortive raid in Mogadishu in October 1993 was reminiscent of Vietnam."[38] While there were no marches on the Pentagon or nation-wide protests as there were in Vietnam, public support was nonetheless gone. Failing to account for public support and not adjusting the information component along with the mission severely hurt American prospects in Somalia. While the deaths of the American soldiers and their very public display would be bad news in any case, prepping the American public for such an eventuality could have mitigated some of the negativity. This is true no matter the operation, but perhaps "public support in the area of operations has proven to be even more important in nation assistance than in combat."[39]

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[36] Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu,* 103
[37] Stevenson, *Losing Mogadishu,* 106
[38] Rudolph C Barnes, *Military legitimacy might and right in the new millennium* (London: Frank Cass, 1996) 134.
[39] Barnes, *Military legitimacy,* 134.

Chapter Five

What does it all mean? Conclusions

It is just plain embarrassing that al-Qaeda is better at communicating its message on the internet than America.
> - Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates

. . . I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.
> – Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, 9 July 2005

Today's commanders understand that reactive public affairs provides no real added value toward the accomplishment of our missions. In order to be effective in our operations, we need the ability for our communications to be proactive or as we call it, "effects-based communication."
> - LTG William B. Caldwell, IV
> Former spokesperson, Multi-National Force Iraq

We need to tell the factual story – good and bad – before others seed the media with disinformation and distortion, as they most certainly will continue to do. Our people in the field need to tell our story – only commanders can ensure the media get to the story alongside the troops.
> - Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld

War is a mind game (Gray)

Colin Gray said it best, when he remarked that war is a mind game.[1] To win that game one must defeat not only the enemy but also

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[1] Colin S. Gray, *Fighting Talk: Forty Maxims on War, Peace, and Strategy (Westport*, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 96.

inspire and motivate his own side. As warfare continues to evolve, straying further away from massive force-on-force actions to smaller, yet still high-intensity conflict, the information component of operations will continue to have a vital and growing role. This is just as true for humanitarian operations such as natural disaster relief, as it is for combat operations such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Information must be planned for in any military campaign. As the US military has evolved from Vietnam, through Grenada, Desert Storm and into Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, this effort has become more evident. As Kenneth Allard said in his book *Warheads, Cable News and the Fog of War,* "this was the practical side of "information operations," the understanding that information had become so fundamental to warfare that to neglect it like a toddler left unattended beside a busy highway was to guarantee that disaster had also not been left to chance. Instead what the Soviets had once called "active measures" were called for, not just to "spin" a story but to shape the larger environment where the whole yarn would be received, believed, and acted upon."[2]

The Role of Information will Increase

The information effort may have started as a secondary mission, but in the past fifty years its role has continued to evolve and increase. The most important aspect of information in warfare is in setting the conditions for victory. The case studies in this thesis have shown how using information to accomplish this, or even more importantly not accomplish this, can prove vital to the outcome of operations.

Both the Tet Offensive in Vietnam and Operation Restore Hope in Somalia were prime examples of how a failure to set the conditions with

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[2] Kenneth Allard, *Warheads Cable News And the Fog of War (*New York: US Naval Institute Press, 2006), 75

the American public hurt the American military effort. In Vietnam, the conditions had been set to lead Americans to believe victory was close at hand. When a large-scale offensive erupted soon after, the public was shocked by a perceived betrayal, and what was a military victory for the US turned into a moral defeat. In Somalia we saw a variation on that where the American public was never invested in the idea of a mission evolving from humanitarian relief to combat operations and the result was a lack of buy-in for those operations, especially after the heavy combat of 3 October, 1993.

On the other hand, the Berlin Airlift was a good example of setting the conditions correctly. The West assured the Berliners they would not abandon them and then continued to push those messages, increasing public support at home and in Europe. The public became invested in the undertaking and supported it through to its end.

An important issue to keep in mind though is that often nothing succeeds like success. For example, could someone really make a case against feeing starving people in Berlin, or Somalia for that matter? And of course, making children happy is almost always guaranteed to be a "good" news story. That is not to say that a horrible communication plan could not destroy public will even in a good news story. If, counter-factually, America had emphasized how the Berlin Airlift was a way to defeat the Communist hordes and that it was the first step to war, would the World War II weary American public had reacted as favorably? In the case of Somalia, which began with public support for a humanitarian operation, how important was the mission creep and changing nature of the operation to the public's support, or lack thereof?

Additionally, the information component, and planning for it, is important to dispel enemy propaganda. Berlin was a good example of this, where the airlift PIOs were able to be proactive and invite media out

to the operation to counter Soviet propaganda that the mission was just a show and doomed to failure. Not only did they dispel the propaganda, but the Germans lost faith in the Soviet/East German media machine. This pattern reoccurred during Operation Iraqi Freedom, where reporters were embedded with combat units to ensure the Coalition's messages were getting out. While not controlling the media, this embedding allowed reporters to see firsthand what was happening and by extension, support Coalition efforts to counter Iraqi lies. As Clarke said, "Media coverage of that story would be the best antidote to Saddam's propaganda."[3]

Public Perception Affect Decision Makers on Both Sides

Former Director of Air Force Public Affairs, Brig. Gen. Ronald T. Sconyers, said, "in today's environment, without favorable public opinion you are not even going to get to the war, let alone being able to wage that war. And it's more than just war—it's peacekeeping, it's humanitarian, it's contingency, it's all those operations where decisions are made in Washington, decisions based on needed public support."[4]

As Sconyers said, public support is more important than many give it credit for and information can and does play a role in building and keeping that support. While some may doubt the public's influence, it is important to remember that the public elects members of Congress and by that route can and does influence policy. This is why it is important to adjust the information plan and actions to keep stride with ongoing military operations and realities. In the case of Somalia, this did not happen, with a resulting loss of support. If the public is kept abreast of

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[3] Clarke, *Lipstick on a Pig* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), 57
[4] Frank Aukofer and William P. Lawrence, America's Team; The Odd Couple—A Report on the Relationship Between the Media and the Military (Nashville, TN: Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, 1995), 158.

the situation they are less likely to lose support at the drop of a hat. In a statement as accurate now as then, John MacArthur said in reference to the 1991 Gulf War,

> Governments at war depend, implicitly or explicitly, on the classical model that unifies the society in supporting conscription of troops and ceasing independent reporting: the fear that a vicious enemy is about to invade our shores, rape our women, kill our children, pillage our cities and towns, and enslave our survivors. But in our generation of contemporary ideological and colonial wars, there is a more abstract basis for military action: the fear that a distant hostile force will damage "our interests abroad." Or that unless military action is taken now in a pre-emptive war against the other country, that country will send its troops to invade and destroy our homeland.[5]

Sun Tzu agrees, saying "The first of these factors [relating to war] is moral influence…by moral influence I mean that which causes the people to be in harmony with their leaders, so that they will accompany them in life and unto death without fear of mortal peril."[6] While MacArthur's words focus a bit too much on manipulating the public's perception, be it through truth or lies, it is nonetheless important to keep the bottom-line message in mind; governments need their peoples' support and the information component is the manner in which to meet this need.

Public will and moral influence are at the center of the case studies examined in this work. Granted, the examples all apply to Western people and democratic governments, but they are relevant nonetheless. In Berlin, there was a hardening of resolve and general buy-in by the public as reports of the blockade and airlift were disseminated throughout the land. What is remarkable is that this occurred four years

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[5] John R. MacArthur, *Second front censorship and propaganda in the 1991 Gulf War* (Berkeley: University of California P, 2004) xiii.
[6] Sun Tzu, *The Illustrated Art of War*, translated by Samuel B. Griffith (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005), 91-92.

after the end of a brutal, total war between the Germans and their enemies turned benefactors.

In Vietnam, the opposite occurred. Despite generally favorable, or at least neutral, public feelings towards the war, the government lost the people's support because the information campaign did not match reality and actually set the military operation up for failure by sucker punching the public with the surprise Tet Offensive. Somalia was similar in that the government shifted the mission of the operation without informing the public and preparing it for the possibility of combat. When the operation shifted from a humanitarian focus, which had general public support, to combat, which the public was not aware of, and then suffered relatively heavy causalities, the already fragile support was lost.

Public support is often seen as an Achilles heel for the West. This is not entirely accurate as the support itself is not the weakness. Instead, it is a failure in working to ensure public support that is often the downfall. An integrated information/communications portion of a military operation that accurately sets the stage will help to alleviate this weakness.

What's needed

Be Proactive

In order to ensure a proactive stance, we must plan information campaigns to get ahead of unfolding events and turn them to the greatest possible advantage. Granted, there will be situations where the goal will be to keep things quiet, but in most armed conflicts, especially larger ones, a proactive approach to information will not only help shape the battlefield but could lessen the risk both politically and militarily. Communication, even proactive communication, also contains a bit of reactiveness, but not the knee-jerk version. Instead, communication

must adapt and respond to emerging information and not stagnate just because people assume it is going well. Therefore, proactive also means adjusting to the battleflow.

LTG William Caldwell, IV, the Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I) spokesmen said that during his initial time in the job he believed that "…we had surrendered the information battlefield to the enemy in the Arabic media. When I arrived, we were doing two separate news conferences each week. One on a Wednesday for the Western press and one on Sunday, several days later for the Arabic press using the same news information for both. Because of this realization, we decided to think creatively and seek alternate methods to reach out to this key and essential audience."[7] This illustrates an unfocused approach to the information component. Using this method, MNF-I essentially alienated or discarded a major audience-- the Arab world. This should have been a focus area rather than comprising an afterthought. Focusing the communications effort on important target groups and speaking with one voice will help ensure that the information and messages we want to transmit have a better chance of getting out. We need concerted, focused plans, not a haphazard approach.

Be Focused

The Berlin Blockade, on both sides, is a good example of a focused approach. Both the East and the West attempted to speak with one voice, have consistency of messages, and build support in a coherent manner. The West was simply better at it and had truth on its side. While that might seem idealistic, in this case, it matted. By proving that the East/Communists were lying, the West helped destroy Stalin's focused effort, or at least mitigate its harm.

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[7] William B. Caldwell, IV, Becoming an Effects Based Communicator, Center for Army Lessons Learned,, no. 9-11 (December 2008): 60.

This focused effort was not present in the American camp during the Vietnam War. As Westmoreland said, the Americans and South Vietnamese used many voices, not always well orchestrated, to conduct the information campaign.[8] Conflicting messages and inaccurate themes, such as "the end is in sight," combined to nullify the effectiveness of the communications effort.

Desert Storm is somewhat of a mixed bag. While there was an information operation to build support for the war, once the war actually began, the effort seemed to lose some of its focus, concentrating more on controlling media access than using communications and information to further the Coalition's aims. The Iraqis appeared to have a focused communications plan. It just was not realistic or particularly well executed and in the end, probably did more harm than good. One thing is certain though, Saddam Hussein certainly portrayed his fight through the war and after as a victory, so he at least stayed on message.

Focused communication can be a good or a bad thing. If one remains focused on a bad or incoherent message, or a message that causes cognitive dissonance, the information campaign is facing an uphill battle. If however, one is able to remain focused on the overall goal, but adjust to the changing situation, the information campaign will benefit.

Use Embedding

An example of a proactive, focused approach to the information side of operations is the embedding of reporters into combat units. While the common image may be of embedded reporters covering Operation Iraqi Freedom, the process actually goes back much further. Reporters have long accompanied military units on operations. It was not uncommon to have roving reporters, such as Ernie Pyle, covering units

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[8] William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1976), 421

during World War II. However, the Berlin Airlift was embedding of a different sort. The purpose was to get largely impartial newsmen, first Germans and then others, into the daily operations to see and report on what was happening with the express purpose of countering Communist propaganda. These embeds, who flew the missions and lived the daily experience of the airlifters, showed the world what was happening at a very basic level.

The embed program was revived for Operation Iraqi Freedom where once again reporters were placed in units, down to the squad and platoon level, to cover the war. Dan Rather said that the embed program gave the world and America especially a view of the troops that, no matter one's feelings on the war itself, inspired pride and admiration for America's servicemen and women.[9]

Don't be Adversarial

This of course is in contrast to an adversarial or even hands-off approach as occurred with media interaction in Vietnam. While there were cases of reporters essentially embedding in units, as with Joseph Galloway and the battle of the Ia Drang Valley in 1965, there was no formal program and reporters were basically free to roam the country at will and report as they wished. This is not to imply censorship was a better option. Rather, by formalizing a program, one would have a better chance at shaping the story by placing reporters in certain units and stressing specific operations. Adversarial or hostile relationships between the media and the military breed distrust and tension. More importantly, when needed, the relationship between the two is not there, or even worse, unfriendly. This makes it that much harder to accomplish any type of information campaign. The same is true of neglecting the relationships. Once again, when needed, the relationships

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[9] Dan Rather, <u>America at war the battle for Iraq : a view from the frontline (</u>New York: CBS News, Simon & Schuster, 2003) ix.

are not there and what media may actually cover the operation do not have the history, education or relationship to truly empathize with the military. Instead of hostile or neglectful relationships between the military and the media, relationships based on trust and professionalism need to be developed.

Bring it down to the tactical level

As stated earlier, just like all politics, all news is local. What this means for a communications plan is that while the overall strategic message, and messaging, is important, it will eventually come down to the tactical level. Embedded reporters, local civilians, enemy combatants – all will interact with US forces at the tactical level and this is where a large effort must be made. The effort is focused on ensuring that these tactical level warrior-communicators, of all career fields, know the overarching messages and how they and their mission fit in. In the past this has taken the form of "media guide" cards (Fig. 8) or booklets with tips. This is a good idea that needs to be expanded. The pre-deployment public affairs briefs are not enough to handle the rapidly changing situation anymore. Additionally, training is needed.

Figure 8: Air Force Media Engagement Tips card (author's collection)

Commanders, and perhaps even more importantly, planners, need to be taught how to properly leverage PA operations, both internal and media, into their operational plans. Currently, DoD offers four advanced, post-Intermediate Developmental Education courses focused on planning and strategy: the Air Force's School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, the Army's School of Advanced Military Studies, the Marine Corps' School of Advanced

Warfighting and the Navy's Naval Operational Planner Course. The schools provide the core of operational planners and as such, their curriculum should include a comprehensive course of study on using PA in the operational context. This will help to ensure PA is no longer an afterthought in the planning process and indeed, plays a more involved role akin to operational fires.

Admiral Michael G. Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that the US military needs to "...work harder...to instill communication...processes into our culture. That task is better served by inculcating communication execution in existing functional areas and by decentralizing that effort."[10] This means communication, and the training to conduct it, should be down at the lower levels.

All military members undergo some form of basic and advanced training. They then practice those skills on a regular basis. Just as a commander would not be expected to send infantrymen who have never trained or become familiar with close quarter combat into that environment, so too should they be exposed to media operations.

Rather than add an hour-long lecture somewhere in pre-deployment training, the services should include regular media training and simulated contact throughout normal training. For example, the Marine Corps has a 45 day course all infantry squad leaders must attend, whose goal is to "... prepare Infantry Sergeants and Corporals for duty as Rifle Squad Leader, focusing on squad and platoon level tactics and weapon systems employment."[11] Media training could be included in this course to familiarize these future squad leaders with the basics of media interaction.

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[10] Michael G. Mullen, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Deputy Secretary of Defense, memorandum, 14 December 2007.
[11] U.S. Marine Corps, "Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) Infantry Squad Leaders," http://www.cpp.usmc.mil/schools/soi/new/ait/squadleaders.htm (accessed 5 May 2009).

The Future

Secretary of Defense Gates said, "…public relations was invented in the United States, yet we are miserable at communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society and a culture, about freedom and democracy, about our policies and our goals… As one foreign diplomat asked a couple of years ago, "How has one man in a cave managed to out-communicate the world's greatest communication society?" Speed, agility, and cultural relevance are not terms that come readily to mind when discussing US strategic communications."[12] This statement accurately summarizes the emphasis, or lack thereof, placed on the information component in operations. It is still something of a pick-up game. In a peaceful situation, this would not be so great an issue. However, we are currently engaged, and will be for the foreseeable future, in a global, war and our enemy has a vote and a voice, and an active one at that.

According to Bill Braniff, of West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, "What we are seeing is al-Qaida trying to control the propaganda output. They are not trying to control the activity on the ground to the same extent as they are trying to control the propaganda about the activity on the ground." .[13] It has often been said that America is losing the information war. That despite our combat power, we cannot win where it counts, with the people. We must get better at this. As Lieutenant General Caldwell said, "With the emphasis on information as an element of combat power, we need to understand that, the maximum effective range of a message is unlimited. All communications have the potential to be global, and we need to expect that our messages will be

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[12] Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense, (address, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, Monday, November 26, 2007**)**

[13] Dina Temple-Raston, "Al-Qaida Media Blitz Has Some On Alert," National Public Radio, 8 April 2009, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102735818

heard and understood in multiple countries, in many different languages, and more important, through many various cultural filters."[14]

[14] Caldwell, Becoming an Effects Based Communicator, 61.

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